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WHAT MIGRANTS WANT *

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I am most thoroughly convinced that a more effective farm program will be put into execution if Extension Service workers and employers will persistently, earnestly, and honestly make a searching effort to find out what actually is the reaction of migrants.

Before attempting to relate the findings revealed by these field trips, may I say that, as a Negro, I am fully convinced that very few white men will ever be able to ascertain the innermost private thinking of the Negro migrant. As a result, very few Extension Service employees and farmers actually know an infinitesimal part of what is in the mind of the migrant. Too often, when a white official seeks information, the Negro migrant, unless convinced beyond a doubt that the interviewer is a friend, will shut up like a clam or will furnish the official with information which the migrant thinks pleases the inquirer. I am further convinced that the migrants very frequently withhold information regarding the difficulties which they encounter resulting from poor employer-employee relationships.

It is evident that there are several major factors which concern the migrant.

ACCEPTABLE HOUSING

Satisfactory housing is the prime factor in securing efficient utilization of farm laborers. In one private camp visited the statement was made: "One could not tell who lives in a house, a mule or a Negro, until one or the other sticks his head out of a hole called a window." The Southern Negro migrants want housing arrangements that permit them to maintain their group unity and individuality with facilities for living, cooking, and eating as family units. Such arrangements afford them greatest satisfaction. Adequate camp housing as interpreted, means provision for shelter, health, convenience, and privacy for members of the family. Provision should be made for recreational, spiritual, educational, and esthetic development for each member of the family. Many of these provisions were found at the Pompano, N. Y., Farm Labor Supply Center Camp. Public sentiment eventually will demand more acceptable housing. Farmers will find it increasingly desirable to make these provisions in order to get migratory labor to assist with the harvesting of their crops.

Where an employer is fully confident that he will be in position to employ male migrants exclusively, barracks and the mess-hall type of housing and feeding may be desirable. I do not believe, however, that employers of Southern migrants can be certain that they will obtain such workers. Were I building a camp for Southern migrants, I think I would follow a less hazardous method and would provide a combination of separate family units, barracks, and mess hall. This arrangement would enable the employer to meet the needs and make use of the migrants as they are found in crews; a mixture of family groups and unattached male and female individuals.

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EMPLOYER-EMPLOYEE RELATIONSHIPS

Camp Management

Good management in the camp is a vital factor. The attitudes of mind of those responsible for the camp, the procedures pursued, and the programs executed are important in enabling occupants to live together with a minimum of friction. Situations should be encouraged that will bring about a wholesome relationship among all concerned. A certain percentage of the labor force is almost impossible to satisfy, but in general if employees are considered as human beings, there will be more favorable responses. There appears to be a growing consciousness of the necessity for better employer-employee relationships. Where these conditions do not exist, the Negro migrant probably will fail to return or will seek a new employer.

Field Management

Good field management refers to those field practices that create favorable conditions and enable workers to produce good results. Too often, supervisors and field bosses are not carefully chosen. Farmers and growers who employ foremen interested in the workers and who pay good wages will have more permanent, adequate, and satisfactory laborers.

Transportation

The method of transportation from one work area to another may lessen successful recruitment. In many instances, migrants are transported to employment areas in trucks. The Oneida Chief Hop Farm near Bridgewater, N. Y., does not allow migrants to be transported in trucks. They travel by bus. Negro migrants prefer the more acceptable methods of transportation.

Wages

In general, the Negro migrant does not offer much complaint about wage scales. The Southern Negro migrant, not unlike other people, believes in a square deal. Usually the Southern migrant respects the contract he makes and in turn he expects the employer to respect his part of the contract. In one area visited, several growers had hired domestic laborers and promised to pay a certain rate. When the Negroes completed the work, they were paid lower wages than that for which they contracted. The laborers refused to return to these growers. In another area, the growers did not have any definite and regular time for pay-day. The migrant prefers a definite and regular pay-day.

On many field trips, I have observed examples of ideal employer-employee relationships, where housing was good, with reasonable sanitary conditions, and where square dealing on the part of the employer and satisfaction on the part of the employees and their families prevailed. As a rule, where such conditions existed, the Negro migrant families returned year after year to the same employer. Where these conditions did not exist, the Southern migrant families failed to return. They sought new employers.

The migratory movement is changing its complexion. Older persons are being replaced by younger people, who have had better opportunities than their elders. They will not be as easily satisfied in many respects. Migratory farm labor is going to be more competitive. I deeply believe that if the problems related to acceptable housing and employer-employee relationship are satisfactorily solved, the matter of recruitment will automatically take care of itself and invariably selective recruitment will follow.

